

CIA PORTRAYS YURCHENKO AS TOP-LEVEL KGB OFFICIAL
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WASHINGTON

Countering critics who claim Vitaly Yurchenko was a minor Soviet spy who may have duped U.S. experts, the CIA said publicly its turnabout defector was the deputy chief of the KGB section responsible for spying on the United States and that he was about to be promoted to general.

The CIA also used its first public statement on the Yurchenko affair to reveal he was having marital troubles before he came over.

The agency hinted those troubles were part of his motive for coming to the West, as opposed to his being a phony defector sent here to embarrass the United States.

In a move that would have been uncommon in any defector case, the CIA on Friday night issued a three-page biography of the 49-year-old Soviet operative whose return to the Soviets shocked this city. Yurchenko told an extraordinary news conference at the Soviet Embassy on Monday that he never defected but was a kidnap victim held against his will for three months.

The CIA document listed all of Yurchenko's alleged spying posts and responsibilities, but gave no indication where the information was obtained or how it was verified, though some apparently would have had to come from Yurchenko.

CIA spokeswoman Patti Volz declined to comment on why the paper was released now.

But it was learned agency officials were piqued over news reports in the past two days in which critics inside the Reagan administration, in Congress and among retired CIA officers suggested Yurchenko was not the top-level Soviet spymaster described by the State Department on Oct. 11.

The CIA has told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Yurchenko was a genuine defector from the leadership of the KGB's most important section - the one assigned to spy on the United States, Senate sources have said.

The CIA told the Senate he provided some useful information but had a change of heart and opted to return to the Soviets in part because a lover in Canada broke off an affair with him.

Although the CIA biography showed Yurchenko once worked on placing double agents in U.S. intelligence services, the document repeated the U.S. claim that he requested political asylum at the U.S. Embassy in Rome on Aug. 1. It also stated that "his relationship with his wife was seriously strained prior to his defection."

U.S. sources had described him in the subsequent three months as the KGB's No. 5 official, but this week sources told The Washington Post he had little operational authority over spies in the field, was merely a colonel in a KGB department with numerous generals and probably wasn't even No. 50 in rank.

The CIA document, however, said Yurchenko was a "general-designate."

Another published report said he may have been pictured in the Soviet news media this summer with top KGB officials only to lend credence to a planned phony defection.

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And one report said National Security Council officers characterized the information Yurchenko imparted in Washington as minimal - "chicken feed."

President Reagan himself said the incident might have been "a deliberate ploy, a maneuver," and added, "the information he provided was not anything new or sensational. It was pretty much information already known to the CIA."

The CIA document indicated Yurchenko would have been in a position to provide a wide array of valuable information.

It said that from April to July of this year he had been deputy chief of the KGB's First Chief Directorate's first department, in charge of gathering intelligence in the United States and Canada. The department supervised KGB agents here and in Canada and coordinated the KGB's work with other Communist-bloc spy agencies here.

The CIA said Yurchenko himself personally supervised the KGB staffs in Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, and supervised a section working against the United States on Soviet territory and selecting agents in the United States. He also supervised wartime plans for his department, the CIA said.

Yurchenko transferred to the KGB in 1959 from the Soviet Navy's submarine service, rising through its ranks with a foreign tour in Egypt in 1968-72 and later in Washington, the CIA said.

Here is a summary of his career as described by the CIA:

September 1980 to March 1985, a top counterintelligence officer with the First Chief Directorate, heading the fifth department of its Directorate K. Responsible for investigating and analyzing suspected espionage or treason by KGB personnel and probing leaks.

The office worked with defectors to the Soviet Union, including former British spies Kim Philby and George Blake.

August 1975 to August 1980, security officer at the Soviet Embassy in Washington - a post he acknowledged at his news conference - working with KGB spies and handling foreigners who volunteered to work for the Soviets.

May 1972 to May 1975, deputy chief of the third department in the KGB's Third Chief Directorate, which handles counterintelligence in the Soviet armed forces. Responsible for using Soviet military counterintelligence officers to recruit foreigners as agents and for inserting Soviet agents, known as "dangles," into Western, especially U.S., intelligence agencies.

December 1968 to May 1972, on the KGB staff in Egypt as an adviser to the Egyptian fleet in Alexandria. Responsible for preventing Western spies from recruiting agents among his colleagues and for recruiting Soviet agents among Egyptian officers.

He was born in a village near Smolensk in 1936, son of a factory worker killed in World War II. Married in 1958, he has a daughter born in 1961 and an adopted son, born in 1969. His wife is an engineer. His son is still in school, and his daughter teaches English and French at a physical culture institute.